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ABSTRACT

A study compared the communication styles of Filipino and Malaysian administrators of public and private organizations devoted to information, education, and communication about family planning and population control. Sixty-nine administrators were interviewed in the two countries. Results indicated that there was no overall preference for either interpersonal or interposed methods. Responses by country indicated that sharing correspondence is ranked highest in the Philippines, whereas Malaysians most prefer a two-person conference. Malaysians also ranked group discussion low and written reports high, both indicative of their more formalized milieu. In both countries, memos and the telephone were valued little as methods of communication. Results also indicated that initiation of communication is an index of relative power and authority in a formal organization. Concerning relative proportion of time spent in sending and receiving orders and information, both Filipinos and Malaysians indicated that they send more than they receive. The biggest difference between countries was off-the-job social contact with work associates. Of Malaysians, 92% have frequent non-work contact with peers, 67% see subordinates frequently, and 42% see supervisors frequently. Comparable figures for Filipinos were 33%, 33%, and 20%, respectively. In general, effective communication was observed within the organizations studied in both countries. (Tables of data are appended.) (SRT)

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ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION STYLES OF FILIPINO AND MALAYSIAN ADMINISTRATORS: A COMPARATIVE REPORT

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ABSTRACT

The authors interviewed 69 administrators in the Philippines and Malaysia about organizational communication methods and styles in family planning programs. There was no clear preference for either interpersonal or interposed methods, although the two-person conference was generally favored over any other approach. Telephone and memorandum were little used. Middle-status sources were active initiators of contact and were least affected by receiver status. Away from the job, Malaysians socialized with co-workers much more than did Filipinos.

ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION STYLES OF FILIPINO AND MALAYSIAN ADMINISTRATORS: A COMPARATIVE REPORT

The formal organization has long been recognized as a rich environment for the study of communication flow, leadership style and decision-making. For the scholar whose focus is on cultural variables in the communication process studies of organizational communication in different cultural settings can provide the basis for both intra-cultural description and cross-cultural generalization. Such data are also of potential use to individuals who seek to interact with formal organizations in cultural settings different from their own.

PURPOSE

The authors conducted structured interviews with administrators of public and private organizations devoted to Information, Education and Communication (IEC) about family planning and population control in the Philippines and in Malaysia. Data were sought about administrators' perceptions of a number of IEC matters in their respective countries. That portion of responses devoted to their own communication and decision-making preferences is reported here.[1] The authors acknowledge the desirability of repeating this study to monitor possible changes since the initial visit, especially in the Philippines, but aver that the responses reported here are largely culture-based and probably not very subject to short-term change.

METHOD

The Study Group

Malaysia and the Philippines were chosen for the study on the basis of parallels in their levels of development, their proximity, their wide-spread use of English as an official language, and contrasts between the diversified, public-and-private-agency approach to IEC matters in the Philippines and the more focused, government-centered program in Malaysia. Since interviewing of the administrators occurred primarily on a "field-opportunity" basis, the study group is neither a systematic random nor structured sample of the IEC administrative populations. Almost all of the upper-level and most of the middle-level IEC administrators in each country were interviewed; about half those in lower-level positions were contacted. This is because many of the latter group were in work locations remote from population centers or on training assignments abroad and were thus not accessible within the time and resources of the interviewers. As a result the reported generalizations tend to reflect a view of organizational communication style more related to policy-making and policy-executing than to the conduct of field operations.

The 69 administrators interviewed included 47 in the Philippines and 22 in Malaysia. Represented were 12 public and 12 private agencies in the Philippines and 14 public and 5 private agencies in Malaysia. There were 29 males (22 in the Philippines and 7 in Malaysia) and 40 females (25 in the Philippines and 15 in Malaysia). A status index of respondents was constructed by the investigators, combining job title, salary level and number of

employees supervised. By this means 17 "higher-status" persons (12 Filipinos and 5 Malaysians), 42 "middle-status" individuals (30 Filipinos and 12 Malaysians) and 20 "lower-status" (10 from each country) were identified.

FINDINGS

Information on communication methods and decision-making preferences by these IEC Administrators included relative preference for seven methods of sending and receiving information, status of participants relative to the choice of these methods, amount of intra- and inter-organization contact and off-the-job social contact. These matters are described and compared by country, followed by a more focused look at the large middle-status group, involving thier perceptions of formal and informal networks, decision-making styles, supervision and leadership.

Communication Methods

Respondents were asked how much they relied on each of seven communication methods in their daily work, specified as "much," "some," "little," and "none." Responses were assigned values of 1, 2, 3, and 4, respectively. Means were determined from the sums of responses and ranks were assigned, with smaller means indicating higher preference. Table I indicates ranking of the methods, with a two-country comparison.[2]

Table I about here

The overall rank shows no clear preference for either interpersonal, real-time methods or for less-personal, interposed channels. Responses by country indicate that sharing correspondence is ranked highest by Filipinos, as contrasted with Malaysia, which has a small, concentrated central staff and gives first choice to two-person conferences. Malaysians have a lower preference for group discussion, again perhaps because of smaller staff size and concentration. Written reports play a larger role in Malaysia, indicative of the more formalized milieu observed by the researchers, contrasted with the personalized Filipino style of transacting business which was observed in our visits to places of work.

Status and Preferred Method

The next matter to be examined is the effect of status on choice of method when contacting superiors, subordinates and peers. The ranking and mean of preferences by status is reported in Table II. The smaller the mean, the higher the rank.

Table II about here

Source Status and Initiation of Contact

The interviewees were asked how active they perceived themselves in initiating contact with subordinates, peers and superiors on a 10-point scale, using 1 for "most active" and ranging to 10 for "least active." Table III reports these perceptions.

Table III about here

For lower status sources, there is little receiver-status difference in willingness to initiate contact and this group is least willing to take the initiative in such matters. Middle-status persons are also not affected by receiver status, and are more active in taking the lead. Higher-status individuals initiate contact more with their superiors than their peers or subordinates, apparently functioning more on a responsive basis at those levels. The overall pattern of willingness gives support to the view that initiation of communication is an index of relative power and authority in a formal organization.

From this information, it appears that relative status has some effect on higher-status sources' choice of method. Memos and lectures are still little preferred, as is the telephone, except for contacting peers. Small group discussion is consistently fourth, though the means indicate it to be slightly more popular for working with subordinates than others. Reports are understandably more used for contacting superiors, while subordinates apparently feel less free to initiate one-to-one contact with superiors than with others. For no evident reason,

correspondence is shared less frequently with peers than with those of higher and lower status.

Source Status and Preferred Methods of Contact

In an attempt to relate source status, receiver status and choice of method, information was assembled for middle- and upper-status sources. Table IV shows the middle-status preference.

Table IV about here

Consistency of method rank across receiver status indicates that the administrative "middle men and women" are little affected by status in choosing method of contact. The only notable exception is willingness to use the telephone with peers but not with those above or below.

By contrast, higher-status administrators reflect an awareness of status difference in choosing method. While following the pattern of telephone preference with peers, they share correspondence more readily with superiors than others and become involved in group discussion more readily with those of lower or peer status than with their superiors.

Table V about here

Commentary on Status and Method

Several matters stand out to the Western-oriented observer. One is the low value assigned to memos and the telephone, the common techniques of the U.S. administrator. Apparently needs to

personalize messages when distributing information and announcing decisions are met by this study group through face-to-face conferences. One reason may involve availability of telephones and how well they work. The Malaysian telephone system appears to function somewhat better than in the Philippines (and the phone is slightly more preferred by Malaysians) but overall the telephone still ranks fifth in perceived usefulness. A limitation on wider use of memos may be the scarcity and cost of paper and limited availability of copy machines. But in several offices where interviewers noted modern equipment and internal switchboards, the responses were similar to those in minimally-equipped facilities. The authors suggest a cultural preference in both the Philippines and Malaysia for the less-efficient method of one-to-one contact over the interposed methods which restrict the total flow of information and immediate feedback.

The second part of this paper deals with other matters relating to communication behavior, decision making adn leadership styles. The middle-status group, having the largest representation and the most communicative activity, has been chosen as the focus of analysis.

COMMUNICATION BEHAVIOR OF MIDDLE-STATUS ADMINISTRATORS

Communication behavior is defined as the respondents' perceptions of their activity in the following areas: time allocation for on-the-job contacts; "style" in sending messages to superiors, subordinates and peers; amount and direction of message flow; formal and informal networks; desired attributes of leadership; modes of supervision and decision-making.

Time Allocation in On-the-Job Contact

One means of describing work interaction is to collect estimates of time spent communicating "within" and "outside" the immediate organization. The respondents were asked to regard task-related communication time inside the organization as 100% and estimate what percentage of that time was spent with persons of various status levels. The same question was asked about "outside" time. Results are reported in Table VI.

Table VI about here

Within the organization, contact with subordinates gets the most overall attention by the middle-status group, with peers second and superiors third. Contacting "within" superiors is about equal in both countries, occupying one-fourth of communicator time. Important differences appear with the other receiver statuses. While about 35% of "inside" contact goes to Filipino peers, only about half that percentage is spent with peers in Malaysia. This may be partly explained by the fact that the centralized structure of the Malaysian National Family Planning Board routes instruction and information from top-level administration directly to operating personnel in the various states rather than through the middle-management chain of command in the central offices. In addition, each Section Director (of Information, Research, and the like) functions almost independently of the other sections, so it is not surprising to find that there is little occasion for lateral communication with peers inside the National Family Planning Board operation. This specialization of function in the interests of efficiency may be

achieved at the expense of a comprehensive understanding of the total program.

The other "inside" difference shows about 40% of time spent in contacting subordinates in the Philippines, contrasted with 60% in Malaysia. This reflects a work norm of closer supervision by Malaysian middle management than among Filipinos.

As for the outside dimension, more overall communication is addressed laterally to middle-status peers than to others.[3] "Outside" subordinates are second and superiors are the least contacted. By country, Filipinos choose "outside" peers significantly more than Malaysians, reflecting the multiplicity of public and private IEC organizations in which peers can be found. Outside subordinates are contacted by Malaysian administrators more frequently than in the Philippines, suggesting that the formality of the NFPB organization with its separation of functions needs to be supplemented by informal contact to get the work done. Outside superiors are contacted with about equal frequency by the two country groups.

Communication Styles

Tables III and IV above show the relationship of method and status. For the middle group, what appears striking from that data is the contrast in response shown by Filipinos and Malaysians to "direct oral communication" (1-to-1 conference and group discussion). The Filipinos prefer communicating face-to-face, whether with superiors, subordinates or peers; their Malaysian counterparts indicate that this is a less-preferred style and choose interposed methods more frequently.

When asked about relative proportion of time spent in sending and receiving orders and information, 63% of Filipinos indicated that they send more than they receive; 12% said they spend more time receiving than sending; and 25% indicated that the proportion is about equal. In Malaysia the same pattern is apparent. There 58% said they do more sending than receiving and 17% more receiving than sending, with 25% reporting an equal distribution.

On the researchers' assumption that off-the-job social contact with work associates is an important aspect of total communication flow, questions were included on this matter. Responses revealed a considerable difference by country (Table VII). Of Malaysians, 92% indicate "frequent" non-work contact with peers, 67% see subordinates frequently, and 42% socialize frequently with supervisors. The comparable figures for Filipinos are 33%, 33% and 20%, which is the largest difference in the two-country comparison.

Table VII about here

Perceptions of Decision-Making

One of the indicators of communication in formal organizations is the style by which decisions are reached. Responses about this process are reported in Table VIII. Filipino respondents are in unanimous agreement that their directors make major decisions in consultation with a small group of advisors, while 67% of Malaysians believe this to be the case. Both Malaysians and Filipinos think that their Director seldom decides alone; both said that the Director frequently allows the larger

group of administrators to decide by informal consensus.

Table VIII about here

Perception of Work Autonomy

When asked about the degree of autonomy afforded in their work situation, a majority of respondents agree that it is adequate "most of the time" (Table XI). Respondents in both countries think that they receive an "ideal" amount of supervision (81% of Filipinos and 92% of Malaysians).

Table IX about here

Desirable Attributes of Work Associates

Table X shows the ranking given to seven attributes of peer relationship. "Similarity in values and interests" ranked first, followed by "similarity in educational level." The next-most-preferred attribute was "similarity in economic class." This was followed by "previous acquaintanceship," "kinship," and "similarity in religious and political beliefs." A number of respondents, particularly in the Philippines, commented on the value they placed on interpersonal relationships. For instance, one remarked that a certain colleague was popular because "he understands your needs, feelings and is receptive to new ideas."

Table X about here

On the question of factors that might affect communication with superiors and subordinates, such as "anticipation of promotion in rank," "anticipation of pay raise," "interpersonal trust" and "loyalty to organization," there appears to be a

pattern of uniformity in attitude toward their effect on both superior and subordinated relationships. "Interpersonal trust" was ranked first by 21 respondents vis-a-vis their superiors and 20 ranked it first for subordinates. "Loyalty to organization" was considered next in importance, with "anticipation of pay raise" as the least important factor.

Desirable Leadership Functions

There was a similar pattern in both countries concerning leadership functions among respondents, although the Filipinos ranked "creates team spirit" as the most important attribute, while Malaysians placed a task-oriented function, "initiates programs" as most important, with "creates team spirit" second. Filipinos tied "initiates programs" and "provides information" in second place. The task of "stimulates staff" was rated important in both countries, while "counseling on personal affairs" and "evaluative roles" were considered of minor importance.

Table XI about here

SUMMARY

This paper has focused on the communication behavior and status perceptions of IEC administrators in the Philippines and Malaysia. Some generalizations about the group are possible: they send more than they receive; initiation of communication is congruent with formal status; the preferred method is the one-to-one conference, with lower value placed on memos and telephone; similarity in values and interests is a desired peer attribute. Directors are perceived as making few decisions

unilaterally. There is effective communication within the organizations, if effectiveness is defined as perception of adequate autonomy, adequate supervision, and opportunity to participate in decision-making. Preference for one-to-one interaction with others may not be the most efficient mode, but appears to be favorly regarded in these situations.

Some differences which may be attributed to cultural factors are preference of Filipinos for face-to-face contact with administrators at all levels, contrasted with the more formal Malaysian system of dealing through administrative assistants. The most striking difference is in the Malaysian view of work associates as off-the-job social friends, contrasted with the Filipino preference not to socialize away from work. In general, these two cultural groups have perceptions about communication which are considerably more similar than different. Perhaps the idea that elites and sub-elites in the same occupations are quite homogeneous across cultures should continue to be given serious attention in subsequent cross-cultural studies of organizational communication.

FOOTNOTES

[1]The full report of this project was completed and delivered in 1979 to the sponsor, the Communication Institute, East-West Center, 1777 East-West Road, Honolulu, HI 96822. Material in this paper has not previously been publicly reported.

[2]Paul J. Deutschmann, Huber W. Ellingsworth and John T. McNelly found a similar pattern of preference in their study of Latin American administrators, reported in Communication and Change in Latin America (New York: Praeger Corp., 1968) p. 97. Using structured interviews with 309 respondents whose socio-demographic characteristics were very similar to those of the middle-status group in this study, they found the following order of preference: one-to-one conference, small group discussion, reports, memoranda, telephone, lectures. Sharing correspondence was not included in the list of choices.

In a related study of 29 Japanese educators who had returned to their positions after a year of study in the U.S., Ellingsworth asked the respondents about their relative preference for 16 communication methods, the same list employed in the Latin American study. The list included techniques such as "charts, graphs or photographs," "movies or slides," "articles or periodicals" and "circulars and pamphlets." The preferences of the Japanese and Latin-Americans were generally similar, except that the Japanese valued all methods involving visual elements more highly than the others and also preferred methods including face-to-face contact much more than telephone or memorandum.

[3]The Deutschmann study, pp. 99-101, reported a similar pattern of contact with peers outside the organization. However, the Latin-Americans initiated considerably more upward communication within the organization.

TABLE I

OVERALL RANK AND COUNTRY RANK OF SEVEN COMMUNICATION METHODS

METHODS	OVERALL RANK	PHILIPPINES RANK	MALAYSIA RANK
1-to-1 Conference	1	2	1
Sharing Correspondence	2	1	3
Reports	3	4	2
Small Group Discussion	4	3	5
Telephone	5	5	4
Memos	6	6	6
Lectures	7	7	7

TABLE II

RANK AND MEAN OF METHODS WITH STATUS OF THOSE CONTACTED

METHOD	WITH SUBORDINATES	$\bar{X}$	WITH PEERS	$\bar{X}$	WITH SUPERIORS	$\bar{X}$
1-to-1 Conferences	1	(1.00)	1	(1.06)	2	(1.25)
Sharing Correspondence	3	(1.36)	5	(1.62)	3	(1.32)
Reports	2	(1.32)	2	(1.30)	1	(1.13)
Small Group Discussion	4	(1.39)	4	(1.52)	4	(1.57)
Telephone	6	(1.84)	3	(1.33)	5	(1.67)
Memos	5	(1.59)	6	(1.80)	6	(1.68)
Lectures	7	(2.13)	7	(2.20)	7	(2.20)

TABLE III

COMMUNICATION INITIATION BY SOURCE STATUS WHEN RECEIVERS ARE SUBORDINATES, PEERS, OR SUPERIORS

SOURCE STATUS	$\bar{X}$ WITH SUBORDINATES	$\bar{X}$ WITH PEERS	$\bar{X}$ WITH SUPERIORS
Lower	8.0	8.0	8.7
Middle	7.0	6.9	6.9
Higher	7.0	7.1	5.7

TABLE IV

PREFERRED METHOD BY MIDDLE-STATUS SOURCE WITH THREE RECEIVER LEVELS

METHOD	SUBORDINATES		PEERS		SUPERIORS	
	Rank	$\bar{X}$	Rank	$\bar{X}$	Rank	$\bar{X}$
1-to-1 Conference	1	(1.0)	1	(1.3)	1	(1.5)
Sharing Correspondence	2	(1.4)	2	(1.6)	3	(1.5)
Reports	2	(1.4)	2	(1.6)	1	(1.3)
Small Group Discussion	4	(1.5)	4	(1.7)	4	(1.6)
Telephone	7	(2.2)	4	(1.7)	6	(2.2)
Memos	5	(1.8)	6	(1.9)	5	(1.7)
Lectures	6	(2.1)	7	(2.2)	7	(2.4)

TABLE V

METHOD BY HIGHER-STATUS SOURCES WITH THREE RECEIVER LEVELS

METHOD	SUBORDINATES		PEERS		SUPERIORS	
	Rank	$\bar{X}$	Rank	$\bar{X}$	Rank	$\bar{X}$
1-to-1 Conference	1	(1.1)	1	(1.0)	3	(1.1)
Sharing Correspondence	4	(1.4)	5	(1.7)	1	(1.0)
Reports	2	(1.2)	3	(1.6)	1	(1.0)
Small Group Discussion	2	(1.2)	3	(1.6)	4	(1.3)
Telephone	6	(1.6)	2	(1.2)	6	(2.0)
Memos	5	(1.5)	7	(1.9)	5	(1.7)
Lectures	7	(2.2)	7	(1.9)	7	(2.5)

TABLE VI

COMMUNICATION TIME OF MIDDLE-LEVEL PERSONNEL
WITHIN AND OUTSIDE THE ORGANIZATION

	COMMUNICATION WITH SUPERIORS		COMMUNICATION WITH SUBORDINATES		PEER-TO-PEER COMMUNICATION	
	Within	Outside	Within	Outside	Within	Outside
Philippines	25.%	26.%	40.%	29.%	35.%	45.%
Malaysia	22.%	29.%	59.%	38.%	18.7%	33.%

TABLE VII

INTERACTION AMONG MIDDLE-LEVEL PERSONNEL IN NON-WORK SITUATIONS

FREQUENCY	PHILIPPINES (N=30)			MALAYSIA (N=12)		
	Superiors	Peers	Subordinates	Superiors	Peers	Subordinates
Very frequently	7%	2%	3%	17%	25%	8%
Frequently	20%	33%	33%	42%	92%	67%
Seldom	40%	47%	20%	58%	8%	42%
Never	0%	0%	3%	0%	0%	0%

TABLE VIII

PERCEPTIONS OF DECISION-MAKING IN THE ORGANIZATION

STYLE	PHILIPPINES (N=24)				MALAYSIA (N=12)			
	Almost Always	Frequently	Seldom	Never	Almost Always	Frequently	Seldom	Never
Director Decides Alone	4%	33%	46%	17%	25%	25%	58%	8%
Director Consults Small Group	17%	100%	25%	8%	17%	67%	17%	7%
Director Consults with Staff	25%	63%	21%	4%	33%	67%	8%	8%
Group Decides	21%	50%	25%	4%	25%	50%	17%	8%
Board Decides in Consultation with Senior Staff	4%	25%	17%	13%	0%	33%	8%	17%

(respondents could indicate 2 styles, sometimes producing marginal totals over 100%; non-responses produced some marginals less than 100%)

TABLE IX

PERCEPTION OF AUTONOMY GIVEN TO SUBORDINATES BY SUPERVISORS

FREQUENCY	PHILIPPINES (N=28)		MALAYSIA (N=12)	
	Subordinates	Superior	Subordinates	Superior
Most of Time	79%	64%	92%	83%
Sometimes	21%	21%	8%	33%
Seldom	0%	7%	0%	0%
Never	0%	0%	0%	0%

TABLE X

PERCEPTION OF DESIRED ATTRIBUTES OF PEER RELATIONSHIP

Attribute	PHILIPPINES *Rank	MALAYSIA *Rank
Similarity in Values and Interests	1	1
Similarity in Economic Class	3	3
Similarity in Educational Level	2	2
Similarity in Religious Beliefs	4	4
Similarity in Political Beliefs	5	4
Kinship	5	4
Previous Acquaintance	4	5

*(1-5 order of importance.)

TABLE XI

PERCEPTION OF LEADERSHIP FUNCTIONS

	PHILIPPINES (N=26)				MALAYSIA (N=12)			
	Very Important	Important	Fairly Important	Not Important	Very Important	Important	Fairly Important	Not Important
Initiates Programs	50%	42%	8%	0%	58%	0%	8%	0%
Stimulates Staff	39%	54%	0%	0%	25%	42%	0%	0%
Provides Information	50%	46%	4%	0%	25%	33%	8%	0%
Evaluates	27%	27%	39%	4%	25%	25%	8%	8%
Counsels	15%	31%	31%	27%	25%	17%	17%	8%
Creates Team Spirit	65%	31%	27%	12%	42%	25%	0%	0%

(respondents could indicate 2 functions, sometimes producing marginal totals over 100%; non-responses produced some marginals less than 100%)